Joachim Frenk and Christian Krug (Eds.)

The Cultures of James Bond

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Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier
Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier
Tel.: (0651) 41503
Fax: (0651) 41504
Internet: http://www.wvttrier.de
E-Mail: wvt@wvttrier.de

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Joachim Frenk (Saarbrücken) / Christian Krug (Erlangen)

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Abbreviations

CR	*Casino Royale*
DAF	*Diamonds Are Forever*
DD	*Die Another Day*
DN	*Dr No*
FRL	*From Russia with Love*
FYEO	*For Your Eyes Only*
GE	*GoldenEye*
GF	*Goldfinger*
LK	*Licence to Kill*
LLD	*Live and Let Die*
MGG	*The Man with the Golden Gun*
MR	*Moonraker*
OHMSS	*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*
OP	*Octopussy*
QS	*Quantum of Solace*
SLM	*The Spy Who Loved Me*
TB	*Thunderball*
TLD	*The Living Daylights*
TND	*Tomorrow Never Dies*
VK	*A View to a Kill*
WNE	*The World Is Not Enough*
YOLT	*You Only Live Twice*

Introduction: 'James Bond' and Multiplicity

Joachim Frenk and Christian Krug

This essay collection deals with one of the best-known entertainment franchises in the world. James Bond is much more than simply a fictional character within the 250 pages of a novel, or a bit of two hours' traffic on the silver or television screen. As a global cultural phenomenon, he has long transgressed such narrow confines and has developed nothing short of an own cultural mythology. Just as '007' is the code name for the fictional agent, 'James Bond' itself has become a (cultural) alias; a code name for an integrated set of cultural references and meanings (some of them rigidly hegemonic, some of them surprisingly heterogeneous), of forms of production and consumption, and of pleasures offered, and taken. 'James Bond' (in inverted commas) denotes this complex cultural myth,[1] and two iconic images may illustrate the point.

The first image is from the post-cold-war-fantasy *GoldenEye* – the 1995 film, not the book John Gardner wrote to accompany the film. Ian Fleming is, for the moment, not part of the picture. In his first outing as James Bond, Pierce Brosnan has captured a Russian tank and chases the enemy, who has taken Bond's informant-slash-love-interest hostage, through the streets of St. Petersburg. Handling the tank with his habitual and almost effortless expertise, Bond happily uses the streets of St. Petersburg as a playing-ground, leaving behind a trail of destroyed Russian police cars. At a particularly tense moment – he has just destroyed a spacious entrance with a massive statue he carried on the tank – Bond's reaction to the mayhem around him is a casual gesture: he checks his tie.

Fig. 1: *GoldenEye*, 1995

1 The notion of 'James Bond' as a cultural 'myth' here draws on Roland Barthes's structuralist concept of myth as a means of cultural and ideological critique (cf. *Mythologies*, 1957): As a cultural myth, 'James Bond' has a de-historicizing, naturalizing and universalizing function (the instant recognisability and seeming stability of the character and plots, the universal appeal of the franchise) which, however, hides very specific significations (see below).

The checking of the tie presents us with a self-reflexive, and indeed self-ironic moment where the figure Bond and the franchise open up a crack in the action-driven cinematic illusion and playfully flaunt some of their own conventions, according to which James Bond is supposed to be always – and never – seriously in danger in his unlimited show of effortless superiority. It is a delightfully unreal, self-confident and self-conscious moment in this smashing scene.

The gesture is typical of 'James Bond' because it foregrounds 'style' as Bond's supreme value – and, perhaps, as his only one. In fact, style has always been a major factor that distinguishes Bond from other types of fiction. In their seminal study on Bond, Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott argue that in Ian Fleming's novels, style was already instrumental in constructing Bond in terms of genre, class and nationality *vis-à-vis* the heroes of earlier imperialist spy-thrillers. They argue that Bond lacks the usual class articulation of such heroes:

> [Bond's] tastes and lifestyle have a decidedly international and cosmopolitan flavour. In a word, Bond is not old fashioned. M is, and it is in the relations between Bond and M that a space is opened up between, on the one hand, earlier fictional representations of the lifestyle and ethos of the traditional British ruling class and, on the other, the projection of a new set of elite values and styles. Bond belongs not to the Breed but to a new elite – international rather than parochially English in its orientation – committed to new values (professionalism) and lifestyles (martini). (Bennett and Woollacott 112)

We would argue that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, due to his many revisions and a history of almost sixty years, Bond's multiplicity allows him to be both a signifier of Britain's imperial past – without seeming old-fashioned – and the agent of a cutting-edge present – without becoming a victim of the *Zeitgeist*. Bond's carefully geared multiplicity, targeted at a transcultural multi-million-audience, has allowed him to be always on the side of good while he has enough dark spots and demons on his shoulder to make him more than just a stylish card-board character. But the checking of the tie in *GoldenEye* also illustrates that what distinguishes Bond from the people he pursues may not be much more than just style, which thus also features as a moral category. This also is a recurrent feature of the Bond franchise since the 1960s. Like the villains, Bond seeks success by whatever means. Where they differ is style; according to Bennett and Woollacott, the Bond of the novels relies "on an individual flair which distinguishes him from the villain, not ethically, but instrumentally, in terms of the means by which he acts rather than the ends he pursues" (*ibid*.). The style that Bond exhibits in the 1995-scene involving the checking of his tie is not just a reminder of a tradition that looks back to the novels of Ian Fleming. The scene also conjures up an earlier Bond-self, a pre-Timothy-Dalton-Bond. The self-ironic scene bonds Brosnan to the exploits of the most excessively stylish of Bonds, Roger Moore, to whose image Bond here returns, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The scene illustrates how 'James Bond' has become a self-referential signifying system with its own cultural memory and its own intertextual references – Bond's multiplicity comes attached with a semiotic complexity that works on a number of levels.